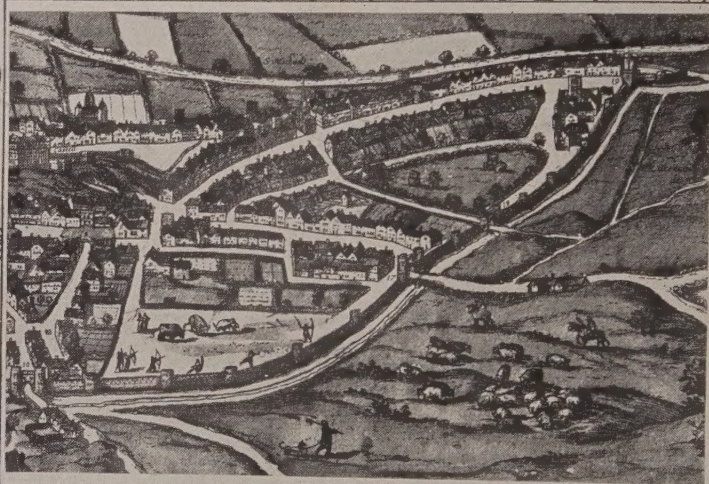




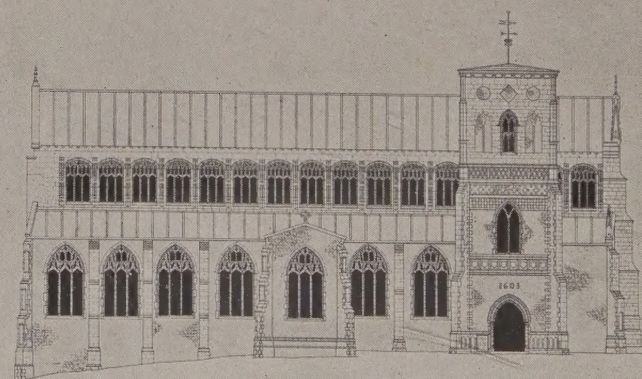
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ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, NORWICH.



• NORTH ELEVATION •

A Norwich Parish

500 years ago :

A SKETCH OF
ST. STEPHEN'S IN 1405.

BY THE
REV. DUNDAS HARFORD, M.A.,
VICAR 1905.

ILLUSTRATED.

Norwich :
FRANK H. GOOSE, THE "NORVIC" LIBRARY, BRIGG STREET.

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Most of these illustrations are reproduced from photographs by Mr. A. E. Coe. The borders have been most kindly drawn by Miss Edith Miller from fifteenth-century illuminations, and from other sources.

Preface.



HIS is not a history of St. Stephen's parish. It is only a chapter in that history.

It is not written by an expert, nor for experts. It is only an attempt to reproduce the conditions of parochial life in the Middle Ages, as illustrated in the case of the parish in question.

The writer has tried to deal with the subject in an open-minded, not a partisan, spirit; neither to call the chess-board white, nor black.

If the attempt should meet with encouragement, and especially if it were found to be of interest to more than a merely local circle, the Sketch might be followed by other chapters of the parochial story. These would group themselves, like the present essay, round typical vicars of the parish—Dr. Thomas Cappe, 1530—1546, who was also Master of St. Giles' Hospital, official to the Archdeacon of Norwich, and Prebendary of the College of St. Mary-in-the-Fields; Dr. Miles Mosse, the learned "Puritan," "pastor of the congregation" under Elizabeth, 1584-6; Dr. John Collings, the Presbyterian, who acted as incumbent during the Commonwealth, 1650—1662; with a briefer Sketch of events since 1662.

Meanwhile, cordial thanks are due to several friends who have helped in the issue of this Sketch:—to Dr. Bensly, Mr. J. C. Tingey, and Mr. John Mannings, who have given kind assistance and counsel; and to Mr. Walter Rye, who has been so good as to look through the proof sheets as they came from the press.

May the little book show how

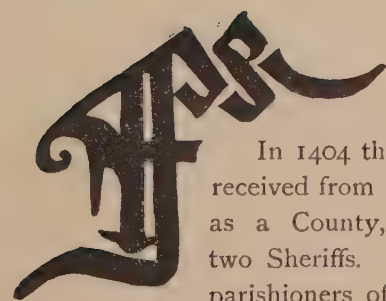
"God is working His purpose out
As year succeeds to year."

Norwich, Whitsuntide, 1905.

A Norwich Parish 500 years ago.

A SKETCH OF ST. STEPHEN'S IN THE YEAR 1405.

Introductory.



IVE hundred years ago
takes us back to 1405.

In 1404 the old City of Norwich had received from King Henry IV. its Charter as a County, ruled by a Mayor and two Sheriffs. The first two Sheriffs were parishioners of St. Stephen's, and of the first five Mayors three came from the same parish.

In 1402 a new Vicar, Master Richard Caister, had been appointed to St. Stephen's, on the presentation of the Prior and Convent of the Cathedral Monastery. He was becoming known, far and wide, for the sanctity of his life and the earnestness of his preaching. It was thought that his teaching was tinged with the "heresies" of Wyclif, who had only died a few years

NOTE.—The initial letters are rubbings from the brass of Robert Burght, 1516.

before. Moreover, in 1401 the persecuting Act, "for the burning of Heretics," had been passed, and the Bishop of Norwich, Henry Despenser, was fully set upon carrying it out.

On the larger stage of the national history, England was in a chronic state of war with France, Scotland, and Wales.

These were stirring times in the world at large, and life was full of change and movement in Norwich and in St. Stephen's.

* * * *

Archæology, we all know, is proverbially as "dry as dust," and much of the present sketch has been gathered from parchments coated with the dust of four or five centuries. But it is wonderful how, as one gets beneath the dust, the old writing, laboriously penned by the monk at his writing desk long ago, brings up the living past. Two things are needed: you must remove the dust—reverently, with a duster, or even, in extreme cases, and with leave, with bread crumbs—and you must remove the dryness, as the painter said, "with brains, Sir!" And when one has but few of one's own, wiser men are very ready to lend theirs for the purpose.

* * * *

We are met then (if the reader can transport himself in imagination to the St. Stephen's Parochial Hall, where the lecture was originally given), on this 11th day of April, 1905, just outside the old wall of the city, near the Gate called then Nedham, and later St. Stephen's, Gate. Let us take a leap back to the year 1405, and go down into the old parish, and visit the church. Starting from that centre let us "beat

the bounds" of the parish. Coming back to the church, let us next look back into its past story. Afterwards, we may visit the interior, study its ancient ground-plan, its ornaments and sacred vessels. Then we may look at some portraits of our predecessors, who worshipped in the church in those bygone days, and whose bones lie still beneath its floor. More than all, we will take note of the notable Vicar of those days, Master Richard de Caister, commonly known as the "Good Vyker." Thus we may be helped to clear some of the dust from the mere outward life and look of things, and to get down to the realities: to the souls of the men and women, to their religion, to their thoughts of God, to the hopes and fears in which they lived, and in which they laid them down to that last resting place beneath our feet.

PART I.

The Parish Bounds and the Parish Story.

I.—GEOGRAPHICAL.



EATING the bounds. Formerly it was the custom to take some small boys with the party which was to go round the parish, and to impress the debatable points of the boundaries upon their memories by such means as should awaken tender recollections in their minds, whenever they might subsequently pass those spots. Failing that, let us start on our tour with such a company as may have perambulated the parish in the year 1405. The "Good Vicar" is accompanied by two leading men of the city, Robert Brasier and John Daniel, both of whom had been Bailiffs of Norwich in 1403, and had on the appointment of the first Mayor in 1404 been elected as the first two Sheriffs. They had gone out of office probably at Michaelmas, but were both shortly to be chosen to the higher dignity of Mayor, in 1407 and 1410 respectively. With us is also another Daniel,

John's brother Walter, who was to succeed to the Mayoralty in the very next year (1406), and again in 1409. Mr. Thomas Cock, the mercer, buried here in 1428, Sheriff in 1414, is perhaps in the company; and, who shall say, Mr. Thomas Bokenham, buried here in 1460, may have at this date (fifty-five years before) been of a suitable age for that purpose to which allusion has already been made. In any case, look at any picture of the Canterbury pilgrims, and you may see in them, and in the lookers-on, types of the company in which we are now supposing ourselves to be.

Setting out then from the north porch of the church, we cross the Horse Market (Rampant Horse Street), and go a few yards down Church Street to where we now see the "leads" on the right hand wall. There we turn to the right, and cross Abraham's Hall, where the Jews in the middle ages carried on the banking business still represented on the site. Coming out into Brigg Street, then a much more important thoroughfare than now (note the "lead"), we turn to our left (along the tram lines through Orford Place to Orford Hill), passing on our right the Brasiers' bell foundry, either already or soon after established on this spot. Half-way up the hill we find another "lead." Impress it on the "memories" of those boys! Here the line runs a short way due south, zigzags to and fro at the back of Red Lion Street, and comes out into St. Stephen's Plain, marching with the bounds of All Saints' parish; next crosses south-east (see "lead") opposite Messrs. Bunting's door, and, perhaps following the course of the "Cockey," an ancient watercourse, to the back of Surrey House (three more "leads") and Surrey Street, comes into All Saints' Green, near "Jack's Pit," a spot bounded now by the residences of prominent medical men.

From this point our course is more clear for some distance, and the boys breathe more freely, whatever is the case with their seniors, for we now mount the hill, up the Swyne Market, to the Brazen Doors (or, as men would now say, to the "Lame Dog"). Here we come out, as may be seen from Cunningham's Map, into the open country, and enjoy a charming view across the fields of Lakenham, as we skirt the outside of the old city wall, as far as St. Stephen's Gate. Probably the wall was then the western boundary of the parish, the only house outside the walls being the Leper Hospital. Turning in at St. Stephen's Gate—where the hermit, William Bassett, looks down at our procession from his little room above the gate,—we pass up what is now Coburg Street to where another "lead" is to be seen, and zigzag again in a somewhat confusing manner to the west of the site of Messrs. Caley's works,* and round that splendid group of ancient monastic buildings, whose foundations Mr. G. E. Hawes has recently been excavating,—the Church and Collegiate buildings of St. Mary-in-the-Fields. Through what is now Theatre Square, and a short way down Theatre Street, we proceed up a little passage opposite Chantry Court, and come back into Church Street, at the spot now marked by the last "lead" that we pass, and so find ourselves once more at the north porch of St. Stephen's Church, from which we made our start.

* . * * *

If the reader will now look carefully at the drawing

* I am told there was a "lead" on an old stable near St. Peter's Memorial Hall; but on enquiring from a man whom I found working there, I received an emphatic reply that there was none. "How do you know?" I asked. "Guv'nor said he'd give me half-a-crown if I found one." This was conclusive.

of the north elevation of the present church, or, still better, will study this page, book in hand, standing at the north side of the church, near the entrance of Church Street, it will not be difficult to distinguish the parts which were in existence in 1405.

It will be noticed at once that there is a difference between the windows of the side aisle and those of the clerestory. The former are pointed, of the Decorated style; the latter are of a flat-headed type, having been built between 1530 and 1550.

Again, the walls of the lower portion of the church are of flint-work; the upper portions are cased with squared stone.

Further, there is a marked difference between the architecture of the north porch and that of the small transeptal chapel to the east of it. The porch is one of the earliest portions of the church, and was probably built about 1350, or a little later; the chapel dates from perhaps two centuries later. Does not this make it all the more annoying that the date 1601 should have been placed outside the porch, when some finishing touches were put to the fabric, at the very close of the Perpendicular period; and that these figures should stand to many unthinking persons as the real age of the church?

It is worth while to study at leisure the carvings on the roof of this porch, and to compare them with the corbel-heads which support the principals of the roofs of the side aisles. Competent students put them down as dating from about the same period, viz., during the reign of Edward III. (1327—1377). The porch contains representations of the four evangelical symbols, and two bosses, showing the martyrdom of St. Stephen, and the legend of St. Laurence and the soul of the Emperor Henry II.

It would seem probable then that when the main building was rebuilt in the Perpendicular style, in the middle of the sixteenth century, the side aisles were not interfered with, and remain much as they were at the date of our sketch, when Master Richard Caister officiated there.

But we are not to suppose that this was the earliest church built on these foundations. All this Decorated work must in its time have replaced architecture of an earlier type, either Early English, or Norman, or even, who knows, Saxon. So let us look back over the history of the past of the church and parish, as far as it can be traced in reliable documents.

II.—HISTORICAL.

Blomefield writes (vol. iv., p. 145):—"This church was founded before the Conquest, as a parochial church for all the sick and *needy* that belonged to the CASTLE, whose dwelling here gave this part of the city the name of *Nedham*, by which it is constantly called in all evidences."

Modern investigators call this derivation in question, and prefer to connect the name Nedham with the same root as the word "neat," Old English for cattle.

Further, it is distinctly disconcerting to search the returns of Domesday Book, drawn up about 1086, and to find that in it there are mentioned by name seven churches, but not St. Stephen's. The remaining churches in Norwich are not named, but it is stated that there were at the time of the survey twenty-six churches and twenty-eight chapels. May it be added, for fear of misunderstanding, that these chapels were not what might to-day be called by that term, for

there were no other places of worship but those of the Church of England for fully five hundred years after the Conquest? These chapels were simply non-parochial churches. We must then shelter ourselves, for the present, amongst these forty-seven unnamed churches, and wait for further light.

As things are, we come out into the light of full historical day about fifty years later than Domesday; and I now proceed to give extracts from three venerable Charters, dating from 600, 700, and possibly 800 years ago, respectively.

The originals are both dry and dusty; but if writer and reader do but club their brains, they may succeed in removing both the dust and the dryness, as before suggested, and we may be able to see the life of the parish, not by itself, but as set against the background of the larger life of the National Church, in city, and diocese, and kingdom.

(1) Our first document is a Charter of Henry II. (reigned 1154—1189), addressed to William Turbe, Bishop of Norwich (1146—1175). A copy is found in the “*Registrum Primum*” of the Cathedral Priory, now in the possession of the Dean and Chapter, from which a full transcript has been most kindly supplied me by Dr. Bensly, its courteous custodian. The following extracts may be enough for our present purpose:—

“**Charter of Henry II.**

“**Henry, King of England to the Bishop of Norwich, William, greeting.**

“**I ordain that the Church of the Holy Trinity and the monks hold Eaton and Newton and the Church of St. Stephen, Norwich as they held them in the day when King Henry, my ancestor, was alive and dead, and as his Charters testify.”**

I have searched in vain for those Charters of Henry I; but what of that? A gentle, but persevering, application of brains to the extract before us will discover beneath its dust a sufficient summary of English Church history for the hundred years that followed the Conquest.

Notice the four leading factors in the situation:—"The King—the Bishop—the Monks—the Church of St. Stephen." There you have the whole matter in a nutshell! Monasticism had been the leading feature in the religious affairs of the country since the Conquest. The parish churches had been founded, and endowed with sufficient property in land to support their clergy, by the generosity of pious founders, for the glory of God and the good of souls. But when the spirit of enthusiasm for the monastic system seized upon Crown, nobles, and landed proprietors of every rank, there began that spoliation of the parish endowments in favour of the monks, which wrought such havoc with the means of subsistence of the parochial clergy, as we are suffering from in the Church of England at the present day, and not least in the Diocese of Norwich.

Take the example before us in this Charter. Some time during the reign of Henry I. (1100—1135) the endowments of St. Stephen's Church had been bestowed by him upon the Benedictine Priory, which had been recently founded, and established in the Cathedral cloister and conventual buildings, by the great Bishop, Herbert de Losinga. In return the monks had to find and support a parish priest to serve the Cure. Thus both the patronage and the properties and the profits of our parish passed into the hands of the monks. Is it to be wondered at that a deepening

feud arose between the "Regular clergy" (*i.e.*, the monastic orders, who lived under "rules,") and the "Secular clergy" (or parish priests, and others, who lived "in the world")? Our next two extracts may give some idea of how this system worked.

(2) Here is a Charter of John de Grey, Bishop of Norwich (1200—1242), found on p. 238 of the First Register of the Priory. It "appropriates" the funds of our church, which already belonged to the monastery as a whole, to the special department of the Chamberlain, and is called, technically, the "Appropriation."

"To all sons of Holy Mother Church greeting in the Lord.

"Let all of you know that we have confirmed to God and the Church of the Holy Trinity, Norwich, and to the monks the Church of St. Stephen in Norwich, after the death of John of Hastings, parson of the same church, to the office of the Chamberlain, for the clothing of the monks saving a pension of 30s., which the Cellarer through the hands of the Chamberlain shall receive annually from the same church

"Given at Norwich, April 11, in the 5th year of our Pontificate" [*i.e.*, 1205].

That takes us back 700 years to a day! And it tempts us aside to the whole subject of the internal economy of a mediæval monastery. But we must wait for that till we can get our promised lecture from Dr. Jessopp, on "How they lived in the Close 500 years ago." Meanwhile, we have only to do with St. Stephen's, and with what concerns, and concerned, St. Stephen's people. And it must have concerned them not a little to see those monks going about in their black and white robes, and to think that their

own parochial revenues were fleeced to provide them. However, so it was for another century. Then a fresh arrangement was made, probably not till after considerable friction between "parson" and chamberlain at the half-yearly pay days.

(3) Our next extracts are greatly condensed from the document called the "Ordination" of the Vicarage, given on p. 50 of the Sixth (or Chamberlain's) Register. They show that the position had become intolerable, and that an appeal had been made to the Bishop to make a change. This he did in the following terms:—

"To all sons of Holy Mother Church, ...

". . . . We, John (Salmon) Bishop of Norwich (1299—1337), desiring that the Vicar should be able competently and decently to serve the said church in Divine things, and that the Prior and Convent should enjoy the fruits of their appropriation, ordain that Clement of Hoxne, Vicar of the same Church, & his successors, should receive and use all the income & profits of the Church, but should pay an annual pension of thirteen marks (£8. 13s. 4d.) to the Prior & Convent in the name of the rectory, at the synods of Easter & Michaelmas. But the Vicar and his successors should be responsible for all ordinary expenses connected with the repair of the chancel, its books & ornaments; but all extraordinary expenses, such as the rebuilding of the chancel if need should require, were to be met, two parts by the monks, one part by the Vicar."

"Given and sealed, at Hevyngham, April 8, 1304."

The subsequent history of this "pension" is another story, and may keep to another time. We have proof that it was regularly paid down to the year 1405. In a gloomy Norman chamber, leading

out of the triforium of the Cathedral choir, not far from the "celestial organ," is a treasury of ancient parchments of inestimable value. Here are stored the Compotus rolls, or balance sheets, of the various officials of the Cathedral Priory, from the end of the thirteenth century to the dissolution of the monastery.

The Chamberlain's rolls are preserved in fairly continuous order from 1318 onward, and in each of them there occur the two entries required by the "Ordination," as witness the following extract from that for 1402, in which year Master Richard of Caister was appointed Vicar of St. Stephen's:—

"Compotus of Brother Thomas of Walton, of the office of the Chamberlain, from the Feast of St. Michael in the 4th year of the reign of King Henry the fourth since the Conquest, to the same Feast in the 5th year of the said reign, and in the 22nd year of Alexander of Totington, Prior"

There follow two statements, first of receipts and then of payments. Among the receipts is this entry:—

"From the Vicar of St. Stephen's for the terms of Michaelmas & Easter, viii^{li} xiii^s iv^d."

Among the payments:—

"To the Cellarer for his pension from the Church of St. Stephen, Norwich, xxv^s."

It will be noticed that the amount paid to the cellarer had sunk from 30s. to 25s., there it remained till the Dissolution, although the pension to the chamberlain had long before then fallen to 53s. 4d. gross, leaving him only 28s. 4d. for himself.

It only remains to conclude this first part of our sketch by giving a list of the Vicars of St. Stephen's from Clement of Hoxne to the Good Vicar, Richard of Caister, only regretting that we cannot at present give the names of any of the earlier clergy of the church, with the single exception of John of Hastings, already mentioned as "parson" in 1205.

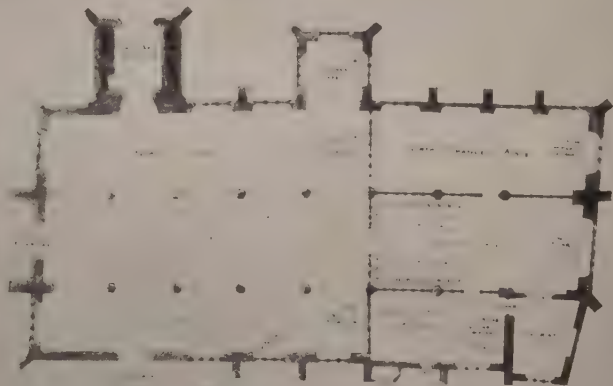
VICARS OF ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, 1304—1420.

- 1304. Clement of Hoxne.
- 1319. Jeffery of Hunstanton.
- 1342. Jeffery of Heacham.
- 1349. Henry Hoddes of Baconsthorpe.
- 1369. John Fride (or Frith) of Alburgh.
- 1398. John Reyner.
- 1400. Jeffery Barney.
- 1402. Richard of Caister. (Died 1420).

* * * *

At this point, in the original delivery of the lecture, the ancient hymn to the Holy Ghost, "VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS," was sung to the old Gregorian tone by a choir of men's voices, drawn from the Festival Chorus, and conducted by Dr. Mann, Organist of King's College, Cambridge. This served both as an example of the sacred music of the period in review, and also to give a tone to the subsequent treatment of the subject.

CHURCH of ST STEPHEN NORWICH.



Sketch Map of Norwich
to illustrate the four orders of Friars and Sites
of Friaries

PART II.

The Parish Church.

IN those days, for better for worse, the parish church was, far more than we can now well understand, the main centre of the religious life of the parish. For better—for unity is strength; and a strongly centralised system has great advantages, when the system is a good one. For worse—when the system, as in this case, had degenerated from its high ideal, become corrupted from its original purity, and arrived at a state sorely needing reformation.

However, the extent to which the system reached to every single person in the parish may be gauged from a return made to Bishop Goldwell in 1492, which, though it be dated at the end of our fifteenth century, and therefore outside our period, may yet be taken as fairly representing church life in the parish during the century as a whole. The Bishop held his Visitation in the Church of St. Peter Mancroft, and there were present from St. Stephen's parish, not only the Vicar, Master Robert Calton (1471—1501), but also four other clergy (Stipendiary or Guild Priests), whose names are given; and of the laity four "Inquisiti" (questmen, or

sidesmen as they would now-a-days be called). On their turn for examination coming, these questmen "presented" three persons as living immoral lives; and they further reported:—

"Item, that John Herver absents himself from his parochial church at the time of divine service on Sundays and Holy-days."

This was all they had to report, or, at least, did report: one absentee out of the whole parish!

It becomes therefore a matter of interest to know whether we have any means of finding out what the church was like, and its services, when the whole parish, except John Herver, crowded into it "on Sundays and Holy-days." Happily, we have exceptionally full means of doing so. First, as to the general arrangement of the church, a variety of "evidences" enables us to locate at least five altars in different parts of the nave and aisles, and to reconstruct the other features of the ground-plan. Secondly, there is in existence a document of priceless value to the archæologist, which supplies a full list of all the goods and ornaments of our church from 1368 to 1424. This has been printed in *Norfolk Archæology*, vol. v., pp. 89-95. The particulars available are here set down under two headings:—
(i.) Ground-plan; (ii.) Ornaments, etc.

(i.) GENERAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH.

By the kindness of Mr. Herbert J. Green, Diocesan Surveyor, I am able to give a ground-plan of the internal arrangement of St. Stephen's, conjecturally sketched by him from the materials above referred to, and using for the purpose a plan measured and

drawn to scale by Mr. A. Gilbert Berry, by whose courtesy the elevation facing p. 1 is also supplied.

In the fifteenth century there was a rood-screen, separating the chancel from the nave, and continued across the two side aisles. In all likelihood there were also parclose screens, dividing the choir from the choir-aisles, and making each of these into a separate chapel, that on the south having an altar dedicated both to St. John the Divine and to St. Mary Magdalen, that on the north being the chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary (a piscina for this altar may still be seen on the south side almost hidden by the organ). On the west side of both the side screens there must have been altars placed: on the north to St. Thomas of Canterbury, "martyred" in 1170, whose shrine in the Mother-Cathedral of the English Church was the goal of all "Canterbury Pilgrimages," and whose initial letter "T" may be seen, illuminated in a graceful pattern, on the ceiling over the spot indicated in the plan for his altar in our church; while on the south was a shrine probably bearing the name of the Holy Trinity, or possibly of St. Nicholas. The chapel of St. Anne was perhaps of later date.

The question will naturally occur to the mind, "Why were all these screens and altars swept away, as they were, at the Reformation?"

The answer to such a question would need a theological treatise by itself. Still, the attempt to indicate the lines of an answer may lead us by the shortest way to an understanding of the religious ideas of the time. This we shall be in a better position to arrive at, when we have first studied the ornaments and other goods of the church, and have called up before our minds some pictures of the living and

dying men and women of those days, to whose spiritual needs these outward and visible things were intended to minister. So let us not treat the lists that follow as mere inventories of antiquarian curiosities, but rather as symbols of all that was most holy and dear, for better, for worse, to the deepest feelings and associations of our predecessors.

(ii.) ORNAMENTS, ETC.

Mr. Henry Harrod, in his introduction to the document above referred to, says, "In the year 1368 William de Swyneflete, Archdeacon of Norwich, caused to be prepared a certain vellum book, in which was forthwith entered inventories of the ornaments of all the churches of his archdeaconry. These were added to by John Derlington, who succeeded him in 1387, to some extent, and by William de Westacre, who succeeded Derlington in 1407, and died in 1419. The subsequent additions are very small indeed." The list of St. Stephen's goods is here dissected, so as to bring together those which fall under each of three categories:—(1) Church plate, with all accessories of metal, stone, or wood; (2) Vestments, with hangings, etc., of stuff; (3) Service books.

(1) CHURCH PLATE, ETC.

"One silver chalice, with one spoon; one chalice of pewter, one paten, ... silver-gilt chalice, given by Thomas Reynbald, four phiols, two thuribles, lantern, lamp, sprinkler, portable cross, holy water stoup, three crosses, two chests for vestments, pix for the Eucharist, crismatory, font under lock, one superaltar, handbell.

“(One silver thurible, with sprinkler, & a silver pix, given by Ralph Ive.)* ”

“(Item, 1 silver-gilt chalice, given by John Reyner, last Vicar, to serve at the altar of St. Mary Magdalen for ever. Item, 1 new gilt chalice, given to the high altar by Master Geoffrey Berney.) ”

“(Item, 2 silver patens, 2 silver candlesticks, 2 silver thuribles, parcel gilt, given by Geoffrey Bonewell, Chaplain, deceased, 2 silver-gilt chalices, complete, given by Walter Daniel, citizen of Norwich, of which one was given to the altar of St. Nicholas, and the other to that of St. Thomas in the same Church Item, 1 chalice with paten, entirely gilt, given by Henry Plomer, Chaplain.) ”

“(1 brass bason for the holy water.) ”

“(Item, 1 great & curious cross, standing upon a gilt foot. with a pamell for the staff of the said cross, all of silver, & well gilt. Item, 1 great thurible, well gilt. Item, 2 little patens of one pattern, parcel gilt, 2 silver phials, parcel gilt, given by John Spencer, some time Vicar. Item, 1 silver thurible, parcel gilt, given by John Schotesham & the parishioners. Item, 1 crismatory of silver, parcel gilt, standing on four feet, given by John Spencer & the parishioners.) ”

(2) VESTMENTS, ETC.

“7 good vestments, 17 linen cloths, 7 towels, 13 corporals, 2 frontals, 10 surplices, veil for Lent, 5 copes for the Choir, of which one given by Richard Fish, and dalmatic.

“Item, 1 vestment, with tunic, & dalmatic, 7 pulvinaria, 2 palls of silk, 3 carpets of worthstede; 1 albe per se with apparel of silk.

* The details between brackets were additions subsequent to 1368.

“(Item, 1 new & complete vestment of white cameta, given by the Rector & Parish; and 1 complete vestment of black cameta, given by Ralph Ive. Item, 2 costers of green tapestry, powdered with divers arms. Item, 1 coster of the same colour, covered with birds, given by William Asseger.)

“(Item, one complete vestment of red cloth of gold, by Ann Hyndes, viz., chasuble, albe, dalmatic, tunic, & 2 copes; & 1 frontal for the high altar, & 2 corporals of the same suit, given by John Gilberd.)

“(Item, 2 sanguine copes of one suit of baudekyn,* given by the executors of John Spencer, vicar Item, 1 complete vestment of cloth of gold, the back black, with white stars, green branches, & great leopards of gold; and 1 lectern clothe of the same suit, of silken cloth of silver. Item, 1 cope of white busteyne,† embroidered with red roses, given by the said John Spencer, vicar.)”

(3) SERVICE BOOKS.

“2 Ordinals, 3 Antiphoners, Legend of Festivals & Saints in 2 volumes, 4 Psalters, Martyrology, 2 Manuals, 2 Processionaries, 3 Missals, 4 Graduals with Tropers, 1 Portifory noted. Item, one Legend of Festivals, noted, given by the vicar and parish. Item, 1 quire with the Service for Corpus Christi in the middle.

“(Item, 1 new & good Processionary, given by Henry Pykyng.)

“(Item, 1 good Missal, with wooden case, fastened with a lock.)

“(Item, 1 great Portifory, adorned with silk and having 4 silver clasps, of the provision of Geoffrey Berney, vicar, & the parishioners.)

* A rich silken material, interwoven with gold thread.

† Fustian.

“(Item, 2 new antiphoners, given by Richard Castre, some time vicar there. Item, 1 Missal, given by Thomas Danyell. Item, 1 Lectionary, noted; 1 Book of Evangelists, 1 book of Epistles, given by Master William Bernham, vicar.)

“(Item, 1 new Matryrology, given by John Spencer.)”

* * * *

There are the lists, as dry and dusty as could well be! But what a world of human nature lies behind them, if we could but get at it.

Read the hymn, or prayer, printed at the close of this part of our sketch, written by “The Good Vicar,” Richard Caister, and you will realise that the man who wore and handled these vessels and robes and books, was no mere formalist, tied down to the externalities of rite and letter, but that the LORD JESUS was a living reality to him, the very breath of his life, and source of all his hopes. The words are here modernised in spelling, but otherwise given as they occur in the copy reproduced facing p. 35.

“Jesu Lord that made me, & with Thy blissful blood
hast bought,
“Forgive that I have grieved Thee, in word, in work,
in will, & thought.
“Jesu, for Thy wounds’ smart, of feet, of side, of
hands too;
“Thou make me meek & low of heart, and Thee to
love as I should do.
“Jesu, grant me this thing, patience in my disease,
“That I make no grucchyng,* in which I should Thee
displease.

* *I.e.*, grumbling.

“Jesu Christ, to Thee I call, as Thou art Father*
full of might;

“Thou keep me clean that I never fall, in no kinds sin
as I have hight.†

“Jesu, that is heaven King, Soothfast God and man
also,

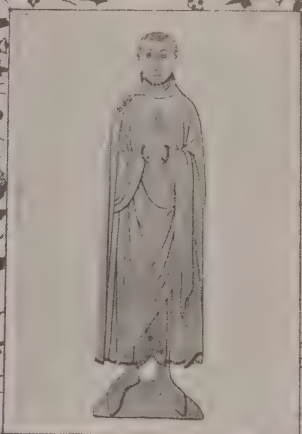
“Thou grant me grace of ending, and all that I am
beholden unto.

“Jesu, for Thy doleful tears, That Thou weptest for
my guilt,

“Thou hear & speed my poor prayers, & save me,
Lord, I be not spilt.”

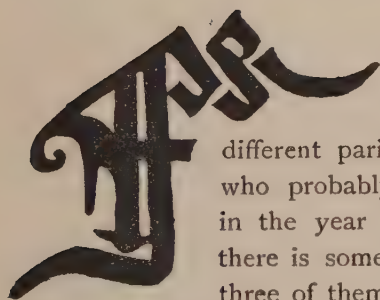
* *Cf.*, Isaiah ix. 6.

† Called, or spoken.



PART III.

The Parish People.



ACING this page are the portraits of seven different parishioners of St. Stephen's, who probably all attended the church in the year 1405. I say probably, for there is some uncertainty about two or three of them, as is explained below.

A few words will serve to introduce the company, before turning to consider their religious life and thoughts, as far as is possible in the light of their history and "remains."

No. 1. Robert Brasier and his wife Christian. A full account of the Brasier family, with the history of their celebrated bell foundry, is given by Mr. John L'Estrange in his *Church Bells of Norfolk* (1874), pp. 27-39. It will be enough to quote the particulars as to this earliest-known member of the family. "Robert Brasier is mentioned as early as 1386, in 1391, 1398, and 1403 he was one of the city bailiffs, and in the last-named year was chosen one of the

first sheriffs. In 1410 he was mayor, and one of the burgesses sent by the city to the parliaments of the 1st and 5th of Henry V., evidently being one of the principal citizens. His will, dated February 2nd, 1434-5, directs his body to be buried in the Chapel of Blessed Mary, on the north side of St. Stephen's Church in Norwich. His occupation does not appear from his will, but Mr. Ewing (in *Norfolk Archæology*) states him to have been a mercer.* In another part of the church is a brass, with effigies of Richard Brasier, son of the above, and of a second Richard, his grandson. Both of these were in turn mayors of Norwich. It was by the latter that both these brasses were provided. His will, dated 1505, and proved in 1513, gives elaborate instructions for them. All that we need note in the matter is the inscription on the brass of the grandfather and grandmother, which is here reproduced in an English version:—

“O all ye who look upon these pictures, pour forth devout prayers to God for the souls of Robert Brasier, formerly Alderman and Mayor of this City, and of Christian his wife; to whom may God give eternal rest.”

Let us keep those last words in mind. They are representative and significant.

No. 2, taken together with the inscription, represents a dual personality, and is worth more detailed notice. The inscription runs as follows, and in this case the original is in the vernacular:—

“Pray for the soule of Eel Buttry, su'tyme pryores of Campesse. On whose soule Jesu have m'cy, the xxiiii^o day of October, m^ov^oxlvi^o.”

* It is more probable that he was a “brazier,” or worker in brass and bell metal.

The words "pray" and "soule" have been partially obliterated by the hands of Puritans, no doubt from objection to the doctrine of purgatory and prayers for the dead. And it may be that even those who have least sympathy with such iconoclasm, will feel that this particular lady, for all her sacred office, deserved to be treated with some measure of "protest"; for it appears that, cuckoo-like, she has deposited her egg of an inscription in the sheltering nest of another lady's portrait brass! It is with this other lady that we are interested, for, according to that expert in brasses, the late Rev. C. R. Manning, the figure is that of a laywoman of our own special period. "The brass," he writes (in *Norfolk Archæology*, vol. vi., p. 295), "..... is evidently of much earlier date than 1546, and must be the memorial of an unknown lady, appropriated, as in the case of many others, for later use by those who had no title to it. It represents the usual female costume of the close of the reign of Henry IV. The figure is completely covered with a long gown, girt at the wrist with very deep sleeves, and a high stiff collar, buttoned under the chin; a veil is worn on the head. The whole costume is precisely that of about the year 1410, and this is the date assigned to the brass by Mr. Haines in the *Manual of Monumental Brasses*, where an engraving of it has appeared (Intro. p. ccx.)." The portrait may thus stand for that of a lady parishioner of St. Stephen's, about the period of which we are now treating. In this it affords a curious contrast to the effigy of Dame Christian Brasier, which was engraved in 1513, in the style of a "fashion plate" of that day, though the lady herself lived a century before, and, after the manner of mayoresses of to-day, no doubt led the fashions of her year.

Nos. 3 and 4 represent Messrs. Walter Daniel and Thomas Bokenham, both of whom have been referred to on p. 5. Of the former there will be much to say, when others have been glanced at. Of the latter it must suffice to quote the inscription:—

“Pray for the souls of Thomas Bokenam and Christian his consort, which said Thomas died on the 12th day of August, A.D. MCCCCLX. On whose souls God have mercy. Amen.”

There is another point of interest in our brass No. 2 which leads up to illustration No. 5. We have seen the portraits of several leading members of the congregation; but what about the great bulk of the parishioners, the poorer people? Happily, it is possible to present two contemporary portraits of these also, as in No. 5. Quite apart from their interest to us in connection with our present subject, it appears from Mr. Manning's "Notice" that these quaint figures have a peculiar importance in the history of monumental brasses. "A more noticeable part of this memorial is the representation, at the feet of the figure, of two beggars or friars, seated, and holding crutches and rosaries. I believe this brass is unique in this respect. I am not aware of any other instance, in brasses, of beggars or bedesmen. These figures have reference to the funeral obsequies of the deceased. In the will of John, Lord Scrope of Upsal, 1451, are these directions:—‘I desire that at my funeral my corpse be carried by my sons and servants, ... twenty-four poor men,* clothed in white gowns and hoods, each of them having a new set of wooden beads, walking before it; and I will that these poor

* At Walter Daniel's funeral fifty poor men and fifty poor women were to be provided with "russet gowns."

men stand, sit, or kneel in the aisle, ... saying their prayers, ... and that each of them receive 6*d.* for their pains.' The unknown lady, commemorated by this brass, was probably a benefactor to the poor, and may have devised by her will that those representations of the objects of her charity should be engraved upon her monument." In any case, a very similar provision is met with in the will of Walter Daniel, in which, indeed, there is enough to illustrate most of the chief features of the religious life of that time. Some extracts from that will, translated into the vulgar tongue from the Latin copy in the Norwich Probate Office, may serve as an introduction to a sketch of the main elements of religious thought and feeling at the opening of the fifteenth century. It is dated February 24th, 1423.

"I, Walter Daniel, ... commend my soul to Almighty God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to all the Saints, & my body to be buried in the Church of St. Stephen in the Chapel of the Blessed Mary Magdalene.

"Item, I will that four annual masses be celebrated in the said Church for two years after my death by fit chaplains, to pray for my soul, and for the soul of Johanna my wife, and of John my brother, and of Emma his wife, and of our fathers and mothers, and of all to whom we are bound.

"Item, I leave to the Vicar of the said Church xl^s.

"..... to the parish clerk xl^d, and to the sacristan there ii*."

* From 1389 to 1399 there occurs annually in the Chamberlain's computus roll this entry:—"Item, clerico Sti Stephani de gratia, vi^d," or sometimes, "iv^d." Some take this to mean what would now-a-days be called the "cleric" of the church; but may not this legacy of Walter Daniel's lead to the conclusion that it rather meant what we should call the "clerk"?

"Item, I leave to each Order of Mendicant Friars in Norwich, c^s.

"Item, to the Austin Friars, c^s.

"Item, to each friar of the same order, xii^d.

"Item, to the high altar of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity for emendation, iiij marks.

"Item, to the Prior of the same, xx^s, and to each of his fellow monks, ij^s.

"Item, to each Sister and Half-sister of the Hospital of St. Paul, iijs iiij^d.*

"Item, to each person lying sick in bed in the Hospital of St. Giles, ij^s.

"Item, to the recluse of St. Julian in Conesford, x^s.†

"Item, to each leper at each gate, xij^d.

"The Residue of my goods I leave to my executors, to pay my debts and funeral expenses, and to do for my soul as they think shall please God, and be for the good of my soul and of all to whom I am bound."

In this will it is to be noticed that the testator is wholly concerned with making provision for his soul and for the souls of others. Each legacy has for its object the procuring prayers or masses for their good. Subsequently, in November of the same year, he made a codicil to this will, in which he descended to more mundane particulars.

Meanwhile, in this will there is, as has been already said, enough material to form a back-ground upon which to paint a rough sketch of the religious life of the period. The picture will not be all light, nor (even in the very heart of the "dark" ages) all shade. We look at it from the pinnacle of our pure and reformed religion; but is it not conceivable that a Vicar of St. Stephen's five hundred years hence, if the world

* See Blomefield, vol. ii. p. 432.

† See p. 35.

should last so long, may perhaps look back upon the religious life of the year 1905, and see in it much to move his pity, and much his indignation? "We are none of us infallible, not even the youngest undergraduate," as the late Master of Trinity is traditionally reported to have said.

Picture then the state of religion in the parish in the early years of the fifteenth century.

We have been dealing with the period since the Conquest. During these three hundred and more years three great revivals of religion had passed over the Church of England; roughly speaking, during each of the successive centuries, the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth. The first of these was the revival of the monastic orders by the various "movements," as they would have been called in modern times, inaugurated by the Cluniacs, the Cistercians, and the Carthusians. None of these, however, seem to have made much impression on Norwich. Monasticism indeed never gained a strong footing in the city till after the Conquest. It was not until the very end of the eleventh century that Herbert de Losinga founded the Cathedral Monastery on the old Benedictine lines. Henceforth, reforms might pass over Benedictinism in other parts of the country, but in Norwich the old foundation remained unchanged.

The second revival had a very different fate in the old city. The Friars in the thirteenth century took Norwich by storm. The first to arrive were the Dominicans, or Black Friars, who settled in 1226 on the site where now stands the Octagon Chapel, in the angle between Colegate Street and Magdalen Street; from whence in 1307 they moved across the river to the more eligible site where their fine church still

stands, though put to other uses: the choir being now known as the Blackfriars' Hall, and the nave as St. Andrew's Hall. In the same year (1226) the Franciscans, or Grey Friars, entered the city, and began work, as was their wont, amongst the poor, where they lived most densely crowded, viz., in the district to the east of King Street, between St. Faith's Lane and Rose Lane. Thirty years later, in 1256, the Carmelites, or White Friars, followed and settled in the Pockthorpe district, south of St. James' Church. Last of all came the Austin Friars, an eremite, or hermit, Order, and were established south of the Grey Friars, between Mountergate Street and the river. These "Four Orders of Freers," so often met with in ancient wills, began by being poor preachers, begging their living, and sharing the lot of the most poverty-stricken classes in the large towns. Alas, in the time of their prosperity they went back from the austerity and self-denial of their early days, and became wealthy and idle. John Richard Green sums up the position at the middle of the fourteenth century in a couple of his epigrammatic sentences:—"The older religious orders had sunk into mere landowners, while the enthusiasm of the Friars had utterly died away and left a crowd of impudent mendicants behind it."

It was while religion in England was at this low ebb that the third of the great revivals was set on foot. John Wyclif, at Oxford, and from his country Rectory at Lutterworth, during the years between 1366 and 1384, was setting on foot a movement, which, though it might seem to be early stamped out, was yet destined to result in the ultimate triumph of its principles and aims in our land and Church. Wyclif it was who led the way in attacking the

errors and corruptions in faith and practice which the mediæval Church had introduced into the heart of catholicism. The doctrine of Transubstantiation he openly rejected in 1381. From that date, once more to quote Green, "Pardons, indulgences, absolutions, pilgrimages to the shrines of the saints, worship of their images, worship of the saints themselves, were successively denied." His translation of the Bible proved a mighty weapon in spreading the simpler views of the Gospel. His "Poor Preachers" carried his teachings up and down the country everywhere. A few years later a hostile writer declared that every second man you met was a Lollard.

It is hard to say to what extent Wycliffism moved the religious life of Norwich. Lollardism certainly gained a considerable foothold here. Witness the existence of a Lollards' Pit, at the foot of St. Leonard's Priory, where, as the inscription in Cunningham's map dispassionately puts it, "men are customablie burnt." But it is not easy to measure the degree in which the elements of Evangelicalism and Socialism were mixed up in Lollardy. It was by no means wholly a religious movement.

Again, it is not safe to generalise from too narrow a foundation; and Mr. Walter Daniel must not be taken as representing the whole body of the people of St. Stephen's of his time. But he may without over-stretching the point, be regarded as a very fair sample of the men of his day and class. His will is thoroughly typical of the "ruling passion, strong in death," or in prospect of it, characterising the religious thought of the time. And what was it?

The Bishop of Birmingham, Dr. Charles Gore, will not be taken for an ultra-protestant, or one likely to give an unduly biassed view of the religion of the

middle ages. In a recently-published sermon on Bishop Latimer, a predecessor of his in the See of Worcester, he describes Latimer's indictment against the unreformed theology:—"He saw religion converted, as it were, into a vast system of insurance against purgatory. Christians were occupied in providing for their own and others' souls in purgatory, instead of becoming better men and women here and now. He saw a vast system of money-getting, a gigantic traffic, connected with what he called the 'purgatory pick purse,' and multitudes of clergy ordained as 'massing priests,' who did not preach or teach or labour to make men better."

The first part of this indictment is fully borne out by what we have seen in the will of Walter Daniel. The doctrine of purgatory had taught him to believe that, even if he died in a state of grace, his soul would pass at death into the flames of purgatorial fire; that the length of its stay there could not be accurately gauged, but that the time might be shortened by the prayers of the faithful, and still more by masses celebrated for him through legacies left for that purpose. He had also been taught that the Saints, and especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, had stored up a treasure of merit by their good works of "supererogation," and that they could help towards his release by applying to his account some of these.

One further illustration may be enough to bring into prominence this darker side of mediæval theology, before we take leave of the parish people and turn to the brighter side, as seen in the parish priest, the Good Vicar. In John Myrc's *Instructions for Parish Priests*,* written at the period with which we are concerned, is an interesting instruction as to the

* E. E. Text Society: O.S., 31.

giving of absolution to a sick man who has confessed, and declared himself penitent and believing:—

“May the humility and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the merits of Holy Mother Church, and all the indulgences granted thee, and all the good things which thou hast done and mayest do to the end of thy life, be to thee for the remission of these and all thy other sins.”

Surely, Latimer was right in deploring this admixture of mercenary and self-righteous ideas with the simplicity of the gospel. How much happier it would have been for our predecessors here, if they had been taught what Bishop Gore describes Latimer as desiring to go back to:—“A simple gospel of divine love: that God had sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world; that He had won for us and for all men the forgiveness of our sins; that if we would have faith in Him, our sins were forgiven; we had neither need nor power to purchase salvation by accumulation of merits; it remained for us simply to accept the great salvation, to repent of our sins, to make restitution for wrong done, and then, rejoicing in the light of the face of Christ, who had reconciled us to God, to go on our way to make His kingdom of righteousness and brotherly love prevail.”

That this was, in the main, the ideal and the practice of Master Richard Caister, may be sufficiently gathered from this second part of his prayer to Jesus, the intercession for his people:—

“Jhu’ for hem I thee biseche; that wraththith
thee in ony wise
Withholde fro hem the hondis of wreke*; &
late he’ lyue† in thi seruyce.

* Hands of vengeance. † Let them live.

“Jhu’ ioieful for to seen; unto thi seyntis
euerychoon,

Thou comfort hem that careful ben; & help
hem that ben woo bigoon.

“Jhu’ gide hem that ben good; & mende hem
lord that greue’* thee

And sende men fruyt of ertheli fode; as ech
ma’ nedith i’ his degree.

“Jhu’ that is withouten lees†; almyghti god
in trinite,

Thou ceese this werre‡ & send us pees, wyth
lastyng lone & charite.

“Jhu’ that is goostli stoon§; & grou’d of hoole
churche in erde||

Thou brynge these fooldis of follk in oon; &
reule he’ right lord with oo’ herde.¶

“Jhu’ for thi blisful blood; Thou bring her
soulis to the blisse

And (? for) whom I haue had ony good; &
spare al cristen that doon amysse.”

We may charitably believe that, under such teaching, there were many “seyntis” in the parish in those days, who had received the “simple gospel,” not only as desired by Latimer, but as taught by John Wyclif, and preached by the parish priest of St. Stephen’s, and that many “careful” and “woebegone” souls learnt the joyfulness of a “service” which is “perfect freedom.”

* Grieve.

† Lies, or leasing.

‡ War.

§ Spiritual stone, or rock.

|| Ground of Holy Church on earth. ¶ One shepherd.

PART IV.

The Parish Priest.



NORWICH clergy were not all of the type described by Latimer as “‘massing priests’ who did not preach or teach or labour to make men better.” Nor were all Norwich Christians “occupied in providing for their own and others’ souls in purgatory, instead of becoming better men and women here and now.”

Two of the people named in Walter Daniel’s will reached a very high level of Christian sanctity, the one in the active and the other in the contemplative sphere, viz., Richard Caister, the Vicar of St. Stephen’s,* and Mother Julian, the anchoress of St. Julian’s. (*See* p. 28).

Was the Good Vicar, whose metrical prayers we have studied, with their touching devotion to the person of the Lord, was he ever a visitor to the

* The clause is curious, and deserves printing in the original Latin, for fear of mistranslation:—“Item, lego summo altari ecclesie Sti Stephani pro decimis oblitis et defectis meis, viz., Magistro Ricardo Castro, nuper vicario, C^s ad disponendum in proprios usus juxta ordinationem et discretionem executorum ejusdem defuncti.” Richard Caister died in 1420: the will was made in 1423. “C^s” might represent £50 to-day.

“recluse of St. Julian,” at the “parlour” window, at which it was the rule for “enclosed” persons to receive all who desired to speak with them? If so, he might have learnt deeper lessons of the conditions of prevailing prayer than most other means could have given him. Listen to this only quotation from her wonderful book of mystical religion, *Revelations of Divine Love*. This is how the fourteenth revelation begins:—“After this our Lord shewed concerning prayer. In which shewing I see two conditions in our Lord’s signifying; one is rightfulness, another is sure trust. And all this brought our Lord suddenly to my mind, and shewed these words, and said, *I am Ground of thy beseeching: first it is My will that thou have it; and after, I make thee to beseech it, and thou beseechest it. How should it then be that thou shouldest not have thy beseeching?*” (Edition by Grace Warrack. Methuen, 1901, p. 84).

Well might an eighteenth-century writer on the mystics (Pierre Poiret) refer to these “revelations” as “theodidactæ, profundæ, ecstatiæ.” They were written between 1373 and 1393, or possibly extended to a later date.

But this is a digression, and we must return to St. Stephen’s. Yet the digression helps us to fill in another feature in the picture of religious life in Norwich five hundred years ago. Mother Julian’s writings have often been reprinted. Our Good Vicar’s story and remains are not so well known. It is therefore a happy task to a present-day vicar of the same church to bring them as clearly as may be before the parishioners and other readers.

The portrait facing p. 35 is not contemporary, but is that of Dr. Thomas Cappe, who was Vicar at

the time of the earlier Reformation changes, under Henry VIII., from 1530—1546; about him there will be much to tell at a later time, if the opportunity come. The portrait is only given as typical of a mediæval parish priest. Let it stand then for a portrait of Master Richard Caister, praying amongst and for his people.

A fairly full account of "Richard Caister, theologian," is given in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (vol. viii., p. 220). It is based upon Tanner and Blomefield. For the present account the authorities quoted by both those writers have in all cases been consulted, while fresh material has in several directions presented itself.

The earliest information that we have as to his early life is in the "register" of Merton Priory in Surrey, now in the Bodleian Library. From this it would seem that, though born at the village of Caister, he received his education for the ministry at that distant monastery in the South. In its register, where all matters of interest concerning the house and its members were entered by the precentor, there is preserved this entry, of which Mr. J. C. Tingey has kindly made me a special transcript:—

"Title.—On October 1, 1385, a title was granted to Ric. Castr., for the Diocese of Norwich, having already the first tonsure, to all the sacred orders."*

If anyone be curious to know more of the life of novices and candidates for Orders in a mediæval monastery, there are many details of quaint interest given in an article by Father Gasquet, entitled "The Canterbury Claustral School in the Fifteenth Century," published in his *Old English Bible*.

It would seem probable that, being ordained by the

* Bodleian Library, Laud MS., E. 54,723, fo. lx., dors.

Bishop of Norwich, the redoubtable Henry Despenser, he now settled down as one of the Regular monks of the Cathedral Priory, under the rule of Prior Alexander de Totington. Into the tempting subject of his life here, in cloister and choir, in refectory, dormitory, infirmary, and chapter house, it would be tiring the patience of the reader to stray. Again the curious may be referred to a book by Father Gasquet, "*English Monastic Life*," one of Methuen's fascinating series called "The Antiquary's Books."

In 1397 Master Richard was presented by the Prior and Convent to the living of Sedgeford, near Lynn.

In 1402 he was transferred to the Vicarage of St. Stephen, Norwich. Here he remained till his death in 1420. And here he seems to have led just the life depicted in Chaucer's kindly portrait of the "poor parson of a town." The portrait is so entirely contemporary, being written in the very last years of the fourteenth century, that it seems worth while to quote some part of it, as an introduction to the more personal particulars which have come down to us as to the Parson of our own parish.

"A good man ther was of religioun,
That was a poore PERSONE of a toun;
But riche he was of holy thought and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche.
His parishens devoutly wolde he teche.
Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,-
And in adversite ful patient.

"Wide was his parish, and houses fer asonder,
But he ne left nought for no rain ne thonder,
In sikenesse and in mischief to visite,
The ferrest in his parish, moche and lite,

Upon his fete, and in his hand a staf.
This noble ensample to his shepe he yaf,
That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.

“A better preest I trowe that nowher non is.
He waited after no pomp ne reverence,
Ne maked him no spiced conscience,
But Christes lore, and his apostles twelve,
He taught, but first he folwed it himselve.”

Now hear what Bishop Bale says of him, in his *Illustrious Writers of Great Britain*, printed at Ipswich, 1549-59:—“Richard Caistre, of the County of Norfolk, and coming from near Norwich itself, a man learned and pious for his age, and Vicar at the Church of St. Stephen in that City, called The Good, lead an apostolic and innocent life in great simplicity of spirit. Miracles [Miranda] are narrated of this man, but many are void of all truth. Nevertheless, he was distinguished for remarkable sanctity and a prophetic spirit. He favoured the Wiclevist (or rather the Christian) doctrine strongly, but secretly, for fear of the Papists, having had experience of their tyranny in others. The immodest manners and scandalous example of the clergy he deplored with humble reproof in sermons, since otherwise he was not able to cure it. Many other proofs of piety did the good man display, and amongst other things he wrote, in his native tongue:—

“A Summary of the Ten Commandments.

“Homilies on the eight Beatitudes: between master and servant; between father and son; between man and wife; of brotherly love; and many from St. Bernard. Besides other Homilies and meditations, of which he issued many.

"He died at Norwich on April 4, 1420, and was buried in the chancel of his Church, not without a reputation for sanctity."

In connection with the last sentence, let another will be added to those quoted by Blomefield as relating to his posthumous fame. This was made by his third successor in the living, John Underwood, or Leystoft.

"I leave my soul to the Almighty & merciful God, to His Blessed Mother & perpetual Virgin Mary, to St. Stephen of sacred memory, to Richard de Caster, and to all Saints (et omnibus Sanctis)."

Another authority on *Illustrious Writers of England*, John Pits (Paris, 1619), adds many further details to the Good Vicar's ways of parochial work. The following extracts must suffice:—

"He was a man simple and upright, and no mean scholar. In his sermons he used not so much to attack men's vices with bitter words, as to deplore them with tears of sympathy, and to exhort all to flee from their sins and to have pity upon their own souls. With the ignorant multitude he willingly adopted a familiar style, and used to mingle with crowds to hold pious colloquies.* The simplest folk he loved the best, as being most like himself, saying that of such is the kingdom of heaven He is said to have had the spirit of prophecy, and both during his life and after his death to have been renowned for many miracles."

* The wording is somewhat obscure, and is therefore given here verbatim:—"Cum imperita multitudine libenter familiares miscuit sermones, et ad pia colloquia turbis se ingerebat." Does this mean that he held open-air services? What more "apostolic"?

Blomefield's account* adds the following comments. After quoting the fact that he was "a man of the greatest learning," this is added:—"and what was exceedingly remarkable in those days, a constant preacher of God's word in English, to his parishioners." Also, after an allusion to the "many miracles," which "were said to have been showed at his grave in this church, to which many pilgrimages were made," it is added:—"and this indeed was the original cause that the doctrine of Wickliffe had always such root here; and on this account it is that the Good Vicar's pilgrimages were hindered as much as possible."

These two additions are given here for what they are worth, for no authority is quoted for them.

The question also of the degree in which he held or taught "Wiclevist" doctrines must be held to be a somewhat open one, for Bishop Bale, who is the source of information on the subject, was a very strong partisan of the Protestant side, and would always strain a point to claim a writer for his own way of thinking; and there seems nothing specially "reformed" about either his hymns, or his will, which is the only other first-hand document of his that is at present available.

However that may be, behold him on May 22nd, 1402, instituted by Bishop Despenser to the Vicarage of St. Stephen. If that bishop, on the momentous day of his institution, called him into his study in the palace for a private interview before sending him forth to his new and responsible charge, it is not probable that he gave him any encouragement towards the propounding of Wiclevist doctrines. The old chronicle of Thomas Walsingham† waxes enthusiastic

* Vol. iv., pt. ii., p. 147.

† Roll's series, *Thomas Walsingham*, vol. ii., p. 188.

over this solitary bishop's zeal against these Lollard wolves among the flock,—“and not only wolves, but those rapacious creatures, whose bite is inevitably poisonous and deadly; yet there was no watchdog, who so much as scared them by giving tongue except the Bishop of Norwich, blessed be his name for ever! He swore, and did not repent, that if any of that perverse sect should presume to preach in his diocese, he should either be given to the flames or deprived of his head.” It may from this be readily imagined with what sort of charge Master Richard Caister would be sent up to his new parish. It would probably have had a very different tone from that of any member of the present bench of bishops, who have recently united to send out a call to prayer for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It would more resemble that of the bishop of a century ago:—“Young men, put down Enthusiasm!”

It was a time of great excitement amongst the citizens of Norwich, and not least for the people of St. Stephen's. The city was all agog to get a new Charter from King Henry IV., to put the government of the city on the same lines as those of London. And when the new vicar went round to visit his parishioners, he found the Brasiers and the Daniels and the rest full of the all-engrossing topic. Indeed, it was in this very year (1402) that, having undertaken to lend to the King one thousand marks, he was pleased to promise them a Charter as large and ample as they could devise.*

And this royal need of a loan was no mere distant

* See Blomefield, vol. iii., part i., pp. 119, etc., while waiting for the new *Records of the City of Norwich*, by the Rev. W. Hudson and Mr. J. C. Tingey.

matter, without personal importance to the people of St. Stephen's. The Scots had declared war against the King, and the French were ready to join them; and the question whether the French could successfully land troops on the English coast was no mere academic one, which a Prime Minister might discuss hypothetically in Parliament: it was of pressing and vital importance. So at the instance of the King the four bailiffs, who were then the chief rulers of the city, sent twenty armed men of the leading citizens, and among them Robert Brasier, to Yarmouth with forty archers. There they stayed for only three days, when they were discharged on the arrival of the King's ships and forces; but it must have been an agitating time for poor Mrs. Brasier.

At last, in January, 1404, the new Charter was granted, and sent down to Norwich. It contained these provisions:—"That the city and all the land within the city, ... shall be, and are hereby separated from the County of Norfolk, ... and are hereby made a county of and by themselves, which shall be for ever called the County of the City of Norwich." The office of the bailiffs was abolished, and in future the citizens and commonalty were to elect annually a mayor and two sheriffs.

All this had its special interest for St. Stephen's, in that our friends, Robert Brasier and John Daniel, were then amongst the four bailiffs, and consequently quite in the running for the honour of being the first mayor. However, when the election took place, the choice fell upon William Appleyard, who was also re-elected twice in succession, at Michaelmas, 1404 and 1405. It was some consolation to the parish that their two representatives in the office of bailiff were

jointly chosen to be the first two sheriffs. Also, when the first mayor did go out of office, for four out of the next five years the insignia of the mayoralty were carried, Sunday by Sunday, to St. Stephen's Church. Here is the list of the earliest mayors of the City of Norwich:—

1404 and 1405. William Appleyard.

1406. John Daniel.

1407. Walter Daniel.

1408. Edmund Warner.

1409. Walter Daniel.

1410. Robert Brasier.

And when these men came to church, they were not sent away without the preaching of the Word of God, nor condemned to listen a Latin discourse, which at the best it was a great strain to follow. They heard earnest and practical sermons in their mother-tongue, about their duties to their wives, and sons, and servants, and, what suited them even better, the reciprocal duties of these to them. Yes, these sermons were felt to be worthy of being reproduced; and, though all such "publication" had to be done by the slow process of hand copying, yet it is probable that Richard Caister's old "alma mater," the Cathedral Priory, would be willing to undertake the work of reproduction. It is possible that some of these copies may still be in existence in public or private collections, and the present Vicar would be more than grateful if any reader could tell of such a survival.

In the case of the two hymns, or metrical prayers, printed in the foregoing pages, some curious problems arise. First, how were they circulated? The copy reproduced in facsimile to face p. 35, is taken from a fifteenth-century MS. book in the Trinity College

(Cambridge) Library. Another is in the Library of Merton College, Oxford, where it may have been brought from Caister's former school at Merton Priory. A third MS. exists in the Bodleian; a fourth at Lambeth. Did travellers beg a copy from the Good Vicar and carry it back home? Was there much traffic in these things at that period? Again, how did the extraordinary variations between the copies arise? Take only one example, the second line of the second stanza. In each case the first line runs:—"Jesu, for Thy woundis smert," but in each case the second line varies from all the others.

Lambeth reads—"On feet and on thin hondis two."

Merton reads—"On foote and on handes two."

Bodleian reads—"Of body fete and hondes too."

Trinity reads—"Of feet, of side, of hondis two."

Did the writers (one cannot say copyists) hear the hymn given out, a verse at a time, and set it down from memory? Or did they vary from the original, on the lines of modern editors, where they thought they could improve upon it?

In any case, the Good Vicar was evidently fond of sacred song. And it may be that he found the "3 Antiphoners," mentioned in the inventory of 1368, in a dilapidated state; for, later in the same list, we find:—"2 new antiphoners, given by Richard Castre, some time vicar there." These were books containing the music for all the choral parts of the daily services, or "Hours," as sung by those assisting the chief minister officiating. We find provision made for this gift in the Vicar's will, and with that last document we may well take our leave of him who so faithfully served the parish 500 years ago. It bears witness to his love both of his church and of its poor. It is to

be found, not at the Probate Office, where copies of the other wills already quoted are to be found, but at the Diocesan Registry, in the eighth Register of the Priory, on fol. 135.

“Will of the Vicar of St. Stephen in Norwich.

“In the name of God, Amen. I, Richard Caister, perpetual Vicar of the Church of St. Stephen in Norwich, being in good memory, make my Will on March 27, Anno Domini 1420, in this manner.

“First, I commend my soul to Almighty God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, & to all the Saints; and my body to be buried in the Chancel of St. Stephen aforesaid.

“Item, I leave for the purchase of two antiphonaries for the service of God in the said Church in Divine things, £10.*

“Item, since the goods of the Church according to the canons are the goods of the poor, I leave all my other goods for the larger part to the poor, so that the poor of my parish may be sustained. The residue of my goods I give & leave in the hands of my executors, that they may dispose of them & order them for me, as may seem to them best to please God & be for the good of my soul.

“I appoint as my executors Sir† John Barsham, Rector of St. Michael in Coslany; Sir† Henry Brissl, Chaplain; & Sir† John Rich, Chaplain.”

The will was proved on July 18th, 1420.

Five hundred years ago Chaucer, the first great Master of English verse, had just laid down his pen, only a few years later than Wyclif, the first great Master of English prose.

* This should be multiplied by ten or twelve, to arrive at its value in modern money.

† Latin, *Dominum*.

And the words with which Chaucer brought his Canterbury tales to a close, after marshalling before his readers types of the various classes of the men and women of his day, may fitly close this little attempt to call up again the parochial life of the same period.

“Now preye I to hem alle that herken this litel tretise or reden it, that if ther be anything in it that liketh hem, that thereof they thanken our Lord Jesu Christ, of whom procedeth all witte and all godenesse; and if ther be anything that displeseth hem, I preye hem also that they arrette it to the defaute of myn unkonning,* and not to my wille, that wold fayn have seyde better if I hadde had konning; for oure boke seyth, all that is written is written for oure doctrine, and that is my entente.”

* Want of *cunning* or skill.

FINIS.



J. J. Chapman

Whitby 10/9/05

